

ANIMALS & MEN

THE JOURNAL OF THE CENTRE FOR FORTEAN ZOOLOGY

ISSUE ONE



Is the legendary Mapinguari a surviving Mylodontid
Ground Sloth? ... Frog Falls ... Mystery Martens
... Golden Frogs ... Relict populations of Asian
Rhinos ... The Surgeons Photo is a hoax ... News.

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# THE GREAT DAYS OF ZOOLOGY ARE NOT DONE.....

This is a magazine predominantly about unknown animals but it is not purely a magazine about Cryptozoology or the study of completely new species. We also aim to cover out of place animals, animals that have been declared extinct that suddenly prove their existence and even, to a certain extent Fortean phenomena that involve animals when the editorial team feel that such an article would be either interesting or appropriate.

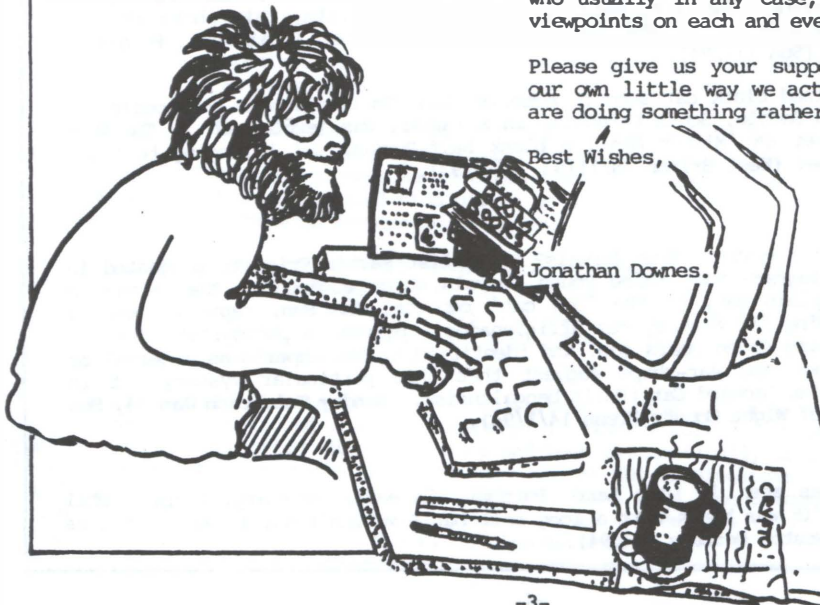
Computers are both the answer to the Fortean's dreams and the bane of their lives. They are wonderful tools for data storage and information processing and they are unwieldy mazes of electronic tat in which evil gremlins can lurk and from whence they occasionally emerge to play havoc with your life. This magazine is produced on a number of computers and over the last three months a lot of things have gone wrong with several of them which is why this debut issue is not only about a month late, but is not up to the standard of typography that we would otherwise achieve. We unreservedly

apologise for spelling, grammatical and typographic errors which may have sneaked past us. Don't judge us too harshly because of them.

This is a non profit making project from a publishing team who have steadfastly failed to make a profit in the seven years we have been in operation. Donations of time, money, equipment and expertise are always extremely gratefully received. If you want to contribute articles, reviews, eyewitness reports, photographs or any other evidence please do.

This is a completely non partisan publication. There are too many painful schisms within the science of Cryptozoology and its allied disciplines and we have no intention of adding any more. We want to provide a forum for discussion and good natured controversy, and we hope that with this, our debut issue we have managed to make a good start. The views expressed in each article are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Editorial Team, who usually in any case, take opposing viewpoints on each and every subject.

Please give us your support because in our own little way we actually think we are doing something rather important.





# NEWSFILE..

Compiled by Jan Williams with occasional irrelevancies from The Editor.  
(Let's face it, Jan would never use the word 'groovy')

## SURGEON'S PHOTOGRAPH A HOAX

The famed Loch Ness Monster photograph, supposedly taken by Colonel Robert Wilson on 19th April 1934 has been declared a hoax. Loch Ness researchers David Martin and Alastair Boyd claim that Christian Spurling, who died last November, confessed to making the monster from plastic - wood and a toy submarine. Spurling was the step-son of film producer Marquise Wetherell who was hired by The Daily Mail to track down the monster. Prints supposedly found by Wetherell in December 1933 proved on examination to be hoaxed - probably made by a Hippo-Foot Umbrella Stand. Ridiculed by Fleet Street, Wetherell asked Spurling to produce a monster. Wetherell's friend Maurice Chambers, suggested Harley Street Gynaecologist Robert Wilson as 'front man' and Wilson was provided with four photographic plates to take to an Inverness Chemists for processing. Overwhelmed by the resulting publicity, the co-conspirators decided to keep quiet. All involved are now dead and the model - sunk by Wetherell - probably still lies on the bed of Loch Ness. (Sunday Telegraph 13/3/94, Daily Mail 14/3/94).

## MYSTERY CATS

### Cornwall.

The British mystery cat scene has been dominated in recent months by The Beast of Bodmin, star of stage, screen and SUN newspaper. Brown, black, and spotted big cats have been seen in the vicinity of Bodmin Moor for many years, but attained 'beastly' status in October '93 when Jane Fuller of Cardinham was knocked unconscious whilst walking her dogs late at night, and awoke to find a black animal crouched growling nearby.

Visual evidence for the existence of at least one large black cat on the moor formed the centrepiece of a BBC South West documentary, later shown nationally on BBC2. The video, shot by farmer Rosemary Rhodes shows a leopard like cat approximately four feet long.

Less impressive was a photo of 'The Beast' which appeared in The Sun on the seventh of January. Taken by Keith Farmer at Fenton Pits, this photo shows a black cat like animal in a most unusual stance, almost as if its tail is nailed to the floor. (Sun 1/7/94).

An alsatian sized black cat seen by motorist Alan Snallbone near the poetically named Praze-an-Beeble, South Cornwall, in November, was 'explained' by The West Briton newspaper as 'Mister Man', a black half-Persian cat belonging to Colin and Dawn Sharpe. (West Briton 25/11/93, 2/12/93).

### Isle of Wight.

Are the island's mystery cats Servals? Naturalist Martin Trippett suggested in The Sunday Telegraph that three young Servals which escaped on the island in 1973 could explain many of the 'big cat' reports. The Sun, rapidly becoming essential reading for mystery cat aficionados - printed a photograph of a cat shot near Brading seven years ago, and identified by the experts as a Serval or Ocelot. Markings and ear-shape suggest that this particular mystery cat is actually an Asian Leopard Cat (Felis bengalensis). (Sunday Telegraph Jan 94, Sun 11/1/94, Isle of Wight County Press 14/1/94).

### Somerset.

A huge cat was seen in Love Lane, Burnham, in early February. Witness Phil Gamblin said "It was black with a long tail but I wouldn't say it was as big as a panther". (Weston Mercury 4.2.94).

### Midlands.

The **Wolverhampton Express and Star** (1/2/94) reported that a Great-Dane sized black cat attacked cat hunters Nick Dyke and his un-named companion in a lonely churchyard at Inkberrow, Hereford and Worcester. Inspired by reports of a leopard-like cat in the area, Mr Dyke and his companion were trying to bait the animal with dead chickens when it leapt from under their feet into a nearby tree. According to Mr Dyke, the cat hit his head and shoulders, sending him flying backwards, then reared up and lashed out at his friend, gashing her rib cage before running away. (**Wolverhampton Express and Star** 1/2/94).

A panther-like cat was seen in Tividale Road, Tipton, West-Midlands in the early hours of February 4th, and later the same day Mrs Eileen Rudd spotted a similar animal in the back garden of her home at Ashenhurst Rd, Dudley. It had a smooth black coat, and a thick tail which curved at the end. (**Wolverhampton Express and Star** 5/2/94, 7/2/94).

### Greater London.

Police with loud hailers warned residents of Winchmore Hill, North London to stay indoors on the 11th March as they searched the streets for a Lion. A helicopter was drafted in and London Zoo supplied a tranquilliser gun. The initial report by David Booth was followed by seven others during the day, describing a golden-fawn animal two foot to two and a half feet high in The New River area. The search was called off after Douglas Richardson of London Zoo examined a photograph taken by Lila Bascock and declared it to be a domestic cat - later identified as Bilbo a ginger tom from Elsiedene Road. A nice tidy conclusion to the mystery - but Winchmore Hill lies three miles from Cuffley and Goff Oak to the north and Finchley to the south west - all noted for big cat reports in previous years. (**Daily Mail** 12/3/94)

### South Yorkshire.

A huge, black cat with piercing yellow eyes shocked a man walking his labrador in Todwick when it crossed the bridleway in front of him. He said that it left pawmarks three times the size of the dog's. (**Yorkshire Post** 15/1/94).

### Lincolnshire.

A four foot long puma-like cat was seen in Stapleford Woods by driver Paddy Morris in January. The cat stared at him for several seconds before disappearing over the hedge. (**Yorkshire Post** 15/1/94).

### Derbyshire.

The Peak Panther - reported in areas around Edale Moor for many years - was seen on two successive days in January by the same witness. Dennis Morley was walking his dogs near Chapel en-le-Frith when the animal appeared. He described it as 4 to 5 feet long, with a black, glossy coat, long, drooping tail, and small ears. (**Yorkshire Post** 21/1/94).

### County Durham.

Possible puma droppings found last year and frozen for preservation by mystery cat investigator Eddie Bell are being sent to experts for analysis.

### Scotland.

Reports of a huge, black cat roaming Glenurquhart prompted the SSPCA to loan a large cage trap to Mr and Mrs Ronnie Moffat whose cottage overlooks Loch Ness. The cage was set up in December but the cat seems to have avoided it so far. (**Press and Journal** 13/12/93)

## Northern Ireland.

Residents of Belfast were warned to stay indoors on 12th January whilst soldiers, police, and a helicopter crew searched for an Indian Tigress believed to have escaped from Bellevue Zoo. The 17 year old tigress was found dead in the moat surrounding her enclosure the following day. (Daily Mail 13/1/94)

## OTHER EXOTICS

### Kent.

Four Argentinian Peccaries (*Tayassu pecari*), were released by vandals from The Brambles Wildlife Park, at West Blean in mid February. Three were recaptured fairly quickly, one even wandering back into its enclosure, but the last one remained at large for a week. According to the newspapers he attacked two dogs, an eleven stone Bull Mastiff and a Rottweiler, but according to the park themselves he was an innocent victim of canine aggression. The four Peccaries were named Dozy, Beaky, (the one that remained out for longest) Mick and Tich. (God only knows what happened to Dave Dee). Afficionados of the late lamented Frank Zappa however would agree that it would have been far groovier if one had been named Gregory. (Daily Mail 28/2/94 1/3/94).

### Kent.

Wild Boar hunting has been revived in Kent - three hundred years after the species became extinct. A 200lb Boar was shot at Wittersham in early March and hunting parties are tracking a sounder of around sixteen of the animals in woods in the vicinity of Tenterden, Benenden and Biddenden. The Wild Swine are accused of damaging vines at Tenterden Vineyard and two cars have collided with the animals. Kent Police say they are aware of the existence of these creatures in the Tenterden area but it is not a major problem. (Daily Mail 16/3/94).

### Oxfordshire.

Bears were kept at the royal palace of Woodstock until the thirteenth century, but revivalists will be intrigued to hear of a brown bear roaming Chadlington, a few miles away. First seen by farmer John Blackwell in September 1992, the bear has made several appearances since - on one occasion causing a bus driver to swerve as it reared up in the road in front of him. The rusty-brown animal leaves huge prints showing long claw-marks, and makes a hooting-howling noise. No livestock attacks have been reported but the bear seems to be partial to goldfish. (Daily Mail 24/1/94)

### Merseyside.

Liverpool's famous Liverbird has been joined by Liver-sharks. To the stonishment of Scousers *Scyliorhinus canicula*, the lesser spotted dogfish shark, has taken up residence in the polluted waters of the River Mersey. The sharks, which grow to a maximum length of about three feet are largely harmless, but they do have a venomous spine in their dorsal fin. Anyone going across the Mersey therefore should stick to the ferry (Sunday Telegraph 9/1/94).

## WORLDWIDE

### THE CREATURE FROM CLEAR LAKE Catfish or primitive whale?

In September 1993, fisherman Lyle Dysin hooked what may turn out to be the catch of his life in Clear Lake, Northern California. And - you guessed it - he threw it back.

Dysin's action was prompted by compassion for the creature, which reminded him



of his "little dachshund". Before returning the 'fish' to the water Dyslin carved his initials into its forehead (seems an odd way to show compassion), and took photographs, which have been sent to scientists for computer enhancement and analysis. Initial reaction was that it was probably a mutant catfish - but is this really the case?

The head of the animal resembles that of a dog, albeit without the ears. Dark and crowned, it slopes to a round-ended nose, with whiskers like those of a catfish. The pectoral fins are fleshy and the back bears bony plates, similar to the diamonds of a sturgeon. But the most suprising feature is the broad, flat tail which is not vertical - as in all fish - but horizontally set like those of whales and dolphins.

It is possible that this is not the only such creature caught on the North American Continent. In *Portean Times* (No 70), Mike Dash referred to William Hagelund's reported capture of a "baby Cadborosaurus" in 1968. The accompanying sketch shows a creature which differs from Dyslin's catch in having only pectoral fins, but shares the crowned, blunt nosed head, the whale-like tail and the dorsal plates. Hagelund also released the animal, moved to do so by "strong compassion for that little face staring up at me".

Discussing Canadian Lake Monster Sightings (*Searching for Hidden Animals - DOOLEYDAY* 1980) Roy P Mackal makes a persuasive case for the survival of primitive toothed whales - *Basilosaurus* or *Zeuglodon* in the region. Mackal states that the vertical flexure reported for Naitaka or Ogoogo, suggests horizontal tail flukes - a mammalian feature. Some reports of the Naitaka refer to plate scales on the creature's back, and to sparse hairs around the head. Plate scales have been found in association with *Basilosauridae* skeletons and hair or bristles around the head are common in many types of whales.

Comparing a 30 inch 'mutant catfish' with a huge serpent-like extinct whale may seem ridiculous but Terry Knight, fishing guide at the 8 million year old Clear Lake, says he receives calls every year from fishermen who claim to have hooked a giant fish which pulled their boat around the lake. Do any baby *Zeuglodon* fossils exist? (*San Francisco Examiner* 3/10/93)

#### NEW CRAB SPECIES

*Climulus Battenae* a new species of crab from the USA was named after its discoverer, Sonia Dawn Batten, a Marine Biologist from Southampton University. *BBC Ceefax* 15/1/94

#### AMBILOCEBUS - A MISSING LINK?

*Amblocebus* - a fifty million year old fossil discovered in Pakistan - is a whale with legs, and provides the link between land dwelling ancestors of the whales and early marine whales with vestigial legs. Hans Thewissen of the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine says swimming would have been its main mode of locomotion - its front feet pointed outward, making walking awkward, and on land it probably rested its body on the ground. (*New Scientist* 22/1/94)

#### HONG KONG MERMAID

A crowd of people gathered on the Hong Kong waterfront in early October 1993, after a fisherman radioed in to say that he'd caught a mermaid. He described it as having a pointy face, human like hair and no arms or legs. Sadly the fishing boat never arrived with the strange haul (*BBC Ceefax* 14/10/93)

*Newsfile Correspondents:* Phil Bennett, Ben Chapman, Louise Cook, Andrew Greig, Nick Maloret, Steven Shipp, Dr Karl Shuker, Samantha Yardy.

# Giant Ground Sloths in Amazonia?

by Jan Williams

Do Giant Ground Sloths still roam the jungles of Amazonia? David C Oren of the Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi is searching for proof in Acre state, West Brazil.

The fossil record shows three families of Ground Sloth: *Megatheriidae*, *Mylodontidae* and *Megalomychidae*. Some were massively built animals exceeding the size of elephants - others just a few feet tall. The vegetarian ground-sloths had molar teeth, well developed tails, and powerful fore claws, and were capable of rising up on their hind legs to pull down branches from trees.

It is assumed that ground sloths went extinct about 8,500 years ago, but the possibility of their survival into modern times was queried during the late nineteenth century. Argentinian paleontologists Ameghino and Moreno collected Patagonian legends relating to a nocturnal, ox sized creature with huge claws, and a piece of hide, encrusted with small bones which resembled that of the fossil *Myodon*. The hide appeared fresh and other remains, both of *Myodon* and of men, were found in the cave from which it came. Additionally, explorer Ramon Lista claimed to have encountered a gigantic creature resembling an *Armadillo*, but with long hair, which seemed impervious to bullets. On this basis Ameghino postulated the survival of a species of ground sloth and named it *Neomyodon listai*.

When *myodon* dung from the cave was tested using the Carbon 14 technique it proved to be at least 10,000 years old. Expeditions to the area failed to find any evidence of living ground sloths and it was suggested that the apparent freshness of the hide was due to conditions inside the cave.

In a paper (1) published in August 1993, David C Oren suggests that Amazonian legends of the 'Mapiquari' are consistent with the expected characteristics of a remnant ground sloth, which may still survive in western Brazil.

Local lore describes the *Mapiquari* as human sized with long reddish fur, a monkey like face, very tough skin, and feet which are 'turned backwards'. It is generally assumed to be either mythical, or as suggested by Heuvalmans, (2), an unknown primate, like the *Didi* of Guyana or the disputed *Ameranthropoides loysi*. Oren himself originally believed the *Mapiquari* to be mythical, until his attention was drawn to reliable contemporary accounts of encounters with the creature.

Witnesses gave Oren remarkably consistent descriptions, both of *The Mapiquari* itself and of the tracks and faeces it left behind. These descriptions, he believes, match the expected appearance and behaviour of a small forest dwelling *Mylodontid* Ground Sloth. The reddish fur is consistent with mummified remains, and ground sloths walked with their claws curved towards their body, which could explain the feet being 'turned backwards'. The size is small for a ground sloth, but, as Oren points out, forest dwelling mammals tend to be smaller than their savannah cousins.

The only vulnerable parts of *The Mapiquari* are said to be the eyes, the open mouth, and the navel region. Fossilised skins of South American *Mylodontids* are formidably armoured with layers of dermal ossicles on the shoulders, back and thighs, and fossil skeletons show some Ground Sloths had ribs which were very close together, providing further protection.

*The Mapiquari* is reported to twist *Bacaba* Palm trees to the ground in order to feed on the fruits. Leaves and stems are often recognisable in the creature's faeces which resemble those of the *Tapir* and the *Horse*. Oren has examined samples of Ground Sloth faeces and states that these also resemble those of horses.



According to legend **The Mapiinguari** has one eye located in its belly. Oren suggests that this may be a specialised gland, capable of producing a noxious gas, which allows specimens to escape. (3).

Could such an animal have survived undetected? Oren points out the difficulty of observing a creature of crepuscular and nocturnal habits in tropical rain forest, and that remains would rapidly decay. Amazonians avoid contact because of the fear it engenders, and eye witness accounts are ignored because of its mythical status.

David Oren hopes that his expedition will provide evidence to show that the Ground Sloth still exists in Amazonia. First hand **Mapiinguari** reports have become less frequent in recent years. If Oren is correct in his beliefs, let us hope that we have not consigned **The Mapiinguari** to legend a few years too soon, and missed the chance of conserving this survivor from the Pleistocene.

#### REFERENCES

1. OREN David C: Did Ground Sloths survive to Recent times in the Amazon region? *Goeldiana Zoologia* No 19 (Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi 1993).
2. BEUVELMANS Bernard: On the Track of Unknown Animals (Rupert Hart Davis:London 1958)
3. *New Scientist* No 1909 (22/1/94).

My Thanks to David C. Oren for kindly providing me with a copy of the above paper.

## feathered folklore

A story that I first heard from my mother has now passed into the realms of Urban Folklore/Modern Myth.

The "Penguin in the Bath" story has been popping up all over the place in different forms. The essentials of the story are that a person/child of doubtful age/sanity picks up a penguin at a zoo/wildlife park and takes it home to put in the bath.

My mother swore that this happened to a friend of a friend's mentally handicapped son on a school trip to Paignton Zoo, but the story has since turned up from many other sources and refuses to die.

Another story which has all the hallmarks of a piece of feathered folklore in the making is the legal battle in India between two families who both claimed that they owned the same pet parrot. The judge showed Solomon like restraint and persuaded the sagacious fowl to recite the names of the children of the family who really owned him. This story has also been repeated on several occasions and seems likely to take its place alongside the other well known piece of parrot lore about the parrot who flies in through the bars of a prison cell and squawks 'I can talk can you fly?' at the understandably annoyed inmate.

The only real puzzle when dealing with these stories of hyper intelligent Psitticiforms is how come my parrot, (A Lesser Patagonian Conure named Socrates) does nothing more Fortean than mumble 'Good Boy' while he is not shouting abuse at all and sundry in what I suppose must be fluent Parrot Language.

Birds eh?

Alison and Jonathan Downes.

# RESEARCH PAPERS.

## EVIDENCE FOR THE HITHERTO UNSUSPECTED SURVIVAL OF TWO RARE MUSTELIDS IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND TOGETHER WITH A REAPPRAISAL OF THEIR TAXONOMIC STATUS

By JONATHAN DOWNES

### INTRODUCTION

In 1977, Langley and Yalden discussed the status of the Pine Marten (*Martes martes*) and The Polecat (*M. putorius*) when they surveyed the decline of the rarer British Carnivores in an eponymous paper for The Mammal Review, (1) and they concluded that both species were long extinct in the southern parts of Britain. There is, however evidence to suggest that they may have been premature in their conclusions especially in the South Western Peninsula, and therefore it seems reasonable to re-evaluate the current status of both species.

### PART ONE: THE POLECAT (*Mustela putorius*)

### CORNWALL

Langley and Yalden place this species as having been hunted to extinction by 1887 (Devon), 1890 (Cornwall), and 1910 (Somerset) but a number of later records suggest that the species survives at least in Cornwall to the present day.

### SOMERSET

There are three Somerset records from the earliest part of this century the most recent being in 1919.(2).

### DEVONSHIRE

Writing in 1968, H.G.Hurrell whose name crops up again and again in this discussion, recorded this species from the Modbury area near Kingsbridge in 1925, and noted another pair which were killed in the same area in 1935 as well as noting an animal seen by his cousin crossing the Dart in 1910.(3) There are a number of North Devon records from the first part of the Century.(4). One was killed by dogs in a cornfield in September 1937, and there was a specimen caught at Coombe Martin in 1906. Hurrell (who obviously didn't know about the 1937 record), stated that the 1935 records were quite possibly the last English records as the animal was by then (1968) confined to Wales and

Scotland. St Leger-Gordon and Harvey (5) give another record from 1930 of four creatures 'larger than stoats' which were seen playing amongst boulders at Bellever, but conclude that it is "probably correct to regard the species as extinct in the region".

The animal was found in Cornwall well within living memory.(6) Writing in 1970 Rennie Bere said: "The Polecat...is known to have been present in the Budock Valley near Falmouth up to 1914." The Institute for Cornish Studies have a number of records (7) including two from Penryn in 1908 and 1919, early 20th Century records from Boscastle, Tintagel, Chacewater and Lands End, as well as 19th Century records from Liskeard and St Ives and records from the valley below Budock School near Penryn, and from Sennen before the first world war.

The most recent Cornish records are from Goonhaven in 1934 and an animal which was seen on a number of occasions near Camborne in 1942, which was probably the same animal as the 'Coarse furred, black bellied ferret' found drowned near Gwealavellan the same year, which Dr Turk described in 1959 as 'Possibly the last surviving Polecat in the County'.

Writing about the status of the Polecat in Cornwall, Rennie Bere says that there are large numbers of what he describes as cross bred Polecat-Ferrets (although the term can be used to describe ferrets with Polecat colouration) living wild in the County. This scenario is used repeatedly by a number of authors to explain sightings of wild looking animals in areas where the wild animal is no longer found. One wonders however from where the wild population that the escaped domestic animals are supposed to have interbred with actually came from.

This excuse is therefore the least effective way of proving that a wild population no longer exists that I have ever heard. A more likely theory, but one which smacks of desperation and an ineffectual attempt at making facts fit the theories is Genetic and can be used to explain the West Country sightings of both Polecats, and Wildcats (*F silvestris*). This is that a well established feral population of the domesticated race of the animal in question, or the domesticated race of a close specific analogue of the animal in question exists. When the animals were first liberated then they interbred with the remnants of the original wild population before the original wild population disappeared, but every now and then a genetic pattern producing characteristics unique to the wild strain comes to the surface and animals of one species are found which exhibit characteristics found only in another species.

As recently as 1985 (8) Porter and Brown wrote that the precise taxonomy of the Mustelidae was uncertain, especially as regards the Weasel Family. The Ferret is generally regarded as a domesticated subspecies of the common European Polecat. They admit, however that it is not only extremely hard to differentiate between certain strains of Ferrets and wild Polecats, but that the knowledge of biochemical and genetic differences between the two animals is so sketchy that true 100% differentiation is impossible. The methods used to differentiate between the two animals are arbitrary in the extreme, (mainly down to differences in the markings of the facial mask-and there is an enormous range of colouration morphs in the wild Polecat let alone the domesticated Ferret). The REAL problem is that the Mammalogical establishment have the intransigent attitude that because they believe that Polecats are extinct therefore all Polecats seen in the wild are actually Ferrets.

We have already discovered one blatant example of this from the South West. Here is another. Rennie Bere writes:(6) "A Polecat-Ferret that I saw near Launceston in March 1969 was unusually dark for a Ferret..." and HERE is the punchline..."but it could not have been mistaken for a Polecat." Why? Many, if

not most eminent zoologists state that the two animals are indistinguishable. It has been claimed by several sources including popular wildlife author Phil Drabble (9) that although the skull of a domesticated ferret is generally considered to be smaller and thinner than that of a wild Polecat, if a 'polecat' was fed on soft food-bread and milk for example-from the time it was weaned and a 'ferret' was flesh fed in an open pen with plenty of room for exercise, the differences would be reversed.

I have two animals in my collection which are undoubtedly of domestic ferret ancestry, but which appear to be of entirely different species. One has the 'typical' polecat build and shape, but is, whilst not an albino extremely light in colour, whereas the other specimen is tiny boned and 'ferret' like whilst having the colouration of a wild Polecat, and looks identical with one of the Sutherland subspecies of the Polecat whose skull was apparently indistinguishable from that of a ferret. (This subspecies is presumed to have been driven to extinction in the years immediately previous to the First World War). Even if one is to accept the explanation that the Polecat-Ferret is a smaller, and lighter coloured beast than the Wild Polecat, animals are still seen in the region, that do not fit in with ANY of the currently accepted models of the taxonomic zoology of the region.

On the 12th April 1992 a pair of animals were seen by Mrs Barbara Holt at Luddock Wood in Cornwall. She described them as eighteen inches in length with a long bushy tail, the back was dark whereas the face had a very distinct mask over the eyes and a white muzzle. They came out of a hedge at about 4.00 PM playfully chasing each other. Mrs Holt looked at pictures of Polecats, Polecat-Ferrets and Ferrets and unerringly described them as the former.(11). There is no doubt that some Ferrets have gone wild in the region, but to my mind there is very little doubt that many of these feral beasts have interbred with the last wild Polecats and that the so called extinction of the species in the county is just another manifestation of Scientific short sightedness.



**PART TWO:**  
**THE PINE MARTEN (Martes martes).**

Although Langley and Yalden (1) state that this species was hunted to extinction by 1834 in Surrey and between 1830-50 in Hampshire there has been a well documented series of sightings in Surrey over the past thirty years or so, and this relict population has even been the basis for a popular childrens book (12) and in a brief account of the fauna of the New Forest the author notes that "occasionally someone thinks they see a Pine Marten"(13). The further west we go, the more doubt is cast upon their results. They state that the species was extinct in Dorset between 1800-50 and in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall between 1870-80. Although I can find no firm records from Dorset later than 1848, (The only other Dorset records, a possible New Forest animal from 1916 and a creamish coloured animal, from Abbotsbury in 1951 (14), which appears to have been a Ferret), the county records for Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, some of which are indeed cited by Langley and Yalden only to be summarily, and somewhat unfairly dismissed paint a more optimistic picture.

**CORNWALL**

Miss S.B Andrews saw an animal that she identified as a Marten in a tree at Tehidy Park in Cornwall during the summer of 1932.(15). Whereas, in the light of new evidence which was not available to Langley and Yalden I am prepared to accept the Devonshire records which follow, this sighting is unique at least as far as I am aware, and is not corroborated by further anecdotal or archival evidence.

**SOMERSET.**

A 1851 report placed the species within the Mammals of Somerset (15) and there was a record of 'something that appeared to be a Pine Marten' from Luckwell Bridge on Exmoor during the winter of 1924 (16). This, again seems on the surface of it to be an isolated incident, but we shall return to the Martens of Exmoor later in this paper.

**DEVONSHIRE**

There is no shortage of historical evidence for the existence of the species within the County but unlike the neighbouring counties, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that this species survived well past 1900. A comprehensive rundown of Devon sightings from the first half of this century was made in 1953 (17) by the renowned Devonian naturalist H.G.Hurrell, a character who assumes pivotal importance in this narrative..

"Mr Rossiter of Paignton tells me he is convinced he saw a Pine Marten near Paignton about 1918. Another reliable observer, Mr Prior of St Albans claims to have seen a Marten in Piles Copse, Dartmoor, about the middle of May 1932. One was seen very clearly at Noss Mayo, River Yealm in June 1952 by Major Brenda Gough. Several times an animal was glimpsed at night at Brentmoor House during 1952. There are reasons for thinking it may have been a Marten. Mrs Weeks of Yelverton and her son suspect that they saw a Marten in a high fir tree at Maristow in April 1953".

Three years later Hurrell wrote again: (18)

"Mr V Almy has come across references to this species at Puslinch, Yealinton in 1843 and 1860. Mr O.D. Hunt reports that his sister saw one at Gnaton near Newton Ferrers on July 11th 1955. It crossed the road in front of their car".

One was seen at Conbeinteignhead on 26.11.72. Another Pine Marten was seen at there a year earlier, implying that this cryptic animal may well have been well established in the area at that time. (19):

"Boxing Day 1971. I saw a Pine Marten on top of my Budgerigar Aviary having been attracted by the noise of the birds. The Marten ran off at my approach. Its identification is not in doubt because I have kept Mink and can state positively that the animal was a Marten"

Another Marten was seen by R.M. Jewson in 1973: (13)

"Denham Bridge, River Tavy 8.9.73: I was fortunate enough to spot an animal moving through the top branches of a high oak tree and then to some more oaks. At first I naturally suspected a squirrel but it was far too big for a squirrel while the tail was too bushy to be a Mink. Also it was dark brown or red certainly not black. It took flying leaps from tree to tree with great agility. Having seen HGH's (Hurrell's) ranch bred Pine Martens when they were allowed to climb trees in a wood at Wrangaton I concluded that the animal I saw was indeed a Pine Marten. The leaps from tree to tree were quite considerable and it was fascinating to watch its performance".

More recently is a report from Wembworthy on the 20th February 1978 made by Mr P.M. Stark: (17)

"8 a.m An animal was seen in the trees of a coniferous wood running along the branches and going from tree to tree by jumping from the end of one branch to the nearest branch of the next tree. I could not see its colour against the light but it definitely had a bushy tail and appeared to be decidedly larger than a squirrel so I felt bound to conclude that it must have been a Marten. Knowing that size can be difficult to estimate I

have carefully reconsidered my assessment, but I still feel it was definitely too big for a squirrel".

An animal which looked very much like a Pine Marten was seen ten years later in August 1988 by Mr Flemming of Exeter. He was driving his family towards Fingle Bridge for a days outing when they got hopelessly lost in the sunken Devon lanes. Suddenly an animal the size of a large cat jumped into the road in front of them and ran up the road before them with the car following at about the same speed. Mr Flemming is interested in Natural History, and was confused at what he saw as he knows that Pine Martens are not found in Devonshire. He described a long, sinuous dark red-brown beast which undulated sinuously along the road before him. On a visit to Wales soon afterwards he visited a Wildlife Park and compared what he had seen with every animal that he could find including Pine Martens and Polecats, and he was convinced that what he had seen was a Marten. His only misgiving was that the

animal had not seemed to have the ubiquitous fawn throat patch or bib, and had seemed to be a uniform colour all over. This, as we shall see is nowhere near as negative a piece of evidence as it would at first seem.

Three years later on the 4th October 1991 Mr Nettley, of Bag Tor House, Ilsington heard his wife call him to see a strange animal that was climbing a tree at the end of his drive. The animal had disappeared by the time his wife had taken him to the tree in question but she gave a clear description of a long thin squirrel like animal about two feet in length, and coloured reddish grey, which she immediately identified as a Pine Marten from one of the families books on British Wildlife. Mr Nettley spoke about the matter to a number of people who all told him that what she had seen was a squirrel, except for his Father in Law, an ex Policeman who told him that a Pine Marten had been shot by a farmer protecting his chickens, somewhere near Honiton sometime since 1960.

Mr Nettley also asked me if I could solve another mystery that had been puzzling both him and several of his friends. Apparently a number of them go shooting in the thick deciduous woods in the immediate area, area (near where Mrs Nettley saw her mystery animal), and they occasionally hear the "bangs and crashes" of a fairly large but seemingly invisible beast apparently chasing something in the branches above them. These noises are regularly punctuated by the sound of the creature (if it is a creature) plummeting to the ground and are then followed by silence. He has experienced this somewhat eerie phenomenon regularly over a period of some years, as have a number of his friends and acquaintances, and he was extremely interested in finding out what could have caused them. According to H.G. Hurrell, (1968), (3) this is the sound made whilst a Marten is hunting a Squirrel from tree to tree, a hunt which culminates with a crash as hunter and hunted fall to the ground. I have reports of similar sounds from several sights within a ten mile radius of the 1991 Pine Marten sightings at Ilsington, and they can only be considered as positive evidence.

The details of behaviour recorded by all these observers are also too similar to be coincidental. There are other interesting aspects of the reports as well. The report of the 1973 sighting was particularly significant. Mr Jewson gave his own reasons why the two animals most commonly reported as Pine Martens, the Mink and the Red Squirrel are really only superficially similar. A well known North Devon Zoologist who has asked to remain anonymous has told me that there is a small but flourishing colony of Pine Martens, some of which he has observed personally in a densely wooded valley on the edges of Exmoor. At least two other wild populations appear to still exist in the county; one outside Teignmouth and the other in the densely wooded areas of southern Dartmoor but are these animals the survivors of the original wild population?

Harvey and St Leger-Gordon noted in 1953 (5) that escapes of Pine Martens did indeed occur at various Fur Farms on Dartmoor and not all of these animals have been recovered. However they also note that from the escape records the male and the female of the species have never been at large together and so a chance of reestablishing this animal as a breeding population has not occurred". The same year H.G. Hurrell remarked: "There have been two or three escapes from Wrangaton since 1940 and one from Chudleigh in 1921. It is unlikely the 1918 Marten could have been an escape but those seen subsequently may have been". I suspect that this is not actually the whole truth. Hurrell, (a naturalist for whom I have the highest regard) had a charming and childish enthusiasm for the species. He wrote a book about his pet ones, and he mentions them enough in all of his other books to show that he was a vociferous supporter of the species. I consider it highly probable that he helped the process of recolonisation along a little by releasing specimens from his own captive breeding programme to bolster up the fading wild population. I know that if I had been in the same position I would have done exactly the same thing!

Paul Blight at the Zoology Department of Bristol University said: "I am convinced that there has been no natural population since the war", and he agreed with me that any specimens still in the

area were probably descendants of animals liberated by Hurrell. Kelvin Boot the Devon Naturalist is also interested in the species but he tends to discount the Devon sightings since about 1950 as being a mixture of misidentification and over eagerness by the Mammal Recorders for the Devonshire Association, who were all members of the Hurrell Family. He told me however that Hurrell had indeed attempted a reintroduction programme on Forestry

Commission land in the 1950s and 1960s but that it had been unsuccessful. I would suggest that from the evidence I have presented, and from evidence that keeps on coming in, that the reintroduction programme was in fact a success, although whether or not Hurrell himself knew this I would not like to say.

On the 17th July 1992 the situation was further complicated when The Animal Liberation Front announced that they had liberated a pair of Pine Martens stolen from Paignton Zoo at an undisclosed site in the County.

### PART THREE: OTHER MARTEN SPECIES IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND?

Ian Linn of the Zoology Department of Exeter University, and also a distinguished Mammalogist, agreed with my tentative theories about Martens in Devonshire but added a bombshell of his own when he said that he believed that the animals kept by Hurrell, which are probably the source of most if not all contemporary Pine Marten reports in Devon were not the native *Martes martes* but the North American *Martes americana*, a closely related but entirely different animal. Another report from 1979, only served to confuse the matter further: (17)

An extremely puzzling corpse was found on the road between Exeter and Exmouth where it had obviously been run over by a car. It was originally identified as a Pine Marten but it was eventually found to be a Beech Marten, (*Martes foina*), a species that is not supposed to have existed in these Islands since before the last Ice Age. Despite the identification of the mystery corpse as being *Martes foina* that was given in the Transactions of the Devonshire



Association, Kelvin Boot is convinced that the animal was an American Marten which ties in neatly with what Ian Linn has already told us. MAFF, however agree with The Devonshire Association and have

it on their files as *M. foina* (2). The preserved corpse has, as is so often the case, disappeared so the matter must remain unsolved, for the moment.

Ian Linn, knows of another escapee Beech Marten, this time from a much earlier period, probably during the Second World War, which escaped from a private collection and lived wild in the area for several years before being found dead in a barn belonging to a farmer living in the immediate area of the animals original owner. There is no reason why *Martes foina* should not live quite successfully in Devon. It is very similar to its better known relative, and there are very few morphological differences. Is there any reason to believe, however, that the animal was ever resident here? The answer, suprisingly, is "Yes". Prior to 1879 it was believed that both species were endemic to the British Isles and the species now known as *M. foina* was generally regarded as being the more common of the two species. In 1879, however Edward Alston (21) reexamined all the specimens he could find in Museums and concluded that *M. foina* did not exist, and indeed had never existed in the British Isles and that all specimens that had been identified as such were merely misidentified Pine Martens. He then immediately contradicted his own theory by pointing out that a specimen of *M. foina* HAD been killed in Northern Ireland during the nineteenth century. Something Alston only mentioned in passing however, but something that has turned up repeatedly during my investigations into the 20th Century geographical status of Martens in Britain is that they are extremely cryptic beasts and ones which even in 1879 had an uncanny habit of turning up where they were least expected in areas where they had been presumed to have been long extinct.

Utilising Heuvelmans' cryptozoological methodology it becomes clear that for a number of reasons, prior to 1879 both scientists and laymen considered the two species to be endemic to Britain and that the two animals were seen as clearly separate species. A paper on the

Mammals of Devon written for The Devonshire Association in 1877 (22) includes the following species of the Mustelidae as resident in the county:

*P. putorius* (Linn) The Polecat, *Martes martes* (Linn) The Pine Marten and as a distinct species:

*Martes foina* (Buffon) The Marti (sic)

"This species is now, I believe, nearly extinct as a systematic war is waged against it by preservers of game. Mr P.F. Amery informs me that the last he has heard of was killed near Ashburton about six years ago".

Writing in 1897 Brushfield described the status of the Pine Marten as vermin in medieval (and later) Devonshire:

"**MARTEN:** There are but few entries on the Parish Accounts of their destruction and all varieties are included under one term. According to Bellamy 'Marten Cat' is one of its names in Devonshire. At Okehampton a 'martyn' was killed in 1780, and a 'marteil' in 1787. Two were paid for at Wellington in 1609 and one ('Marting') in 1700. In each instance 1s was paid. In 1744 '3 Martes Heads' are entered in the Ecclesfield Accounts but from the context they are probably *Pomarts*".

There are so many pieces of corroborative evidence in the preceding paragraph it is difficult to know where to start. It is clear not only that a variety of different names were used, (even two animals killed in the same town only a few years apart were called by different names), which implies that two separate species are being discussed, but it is obvious from the way that Brushfield himself describes the animals that HE considered them to be of two different species. In a late nineteenth century paper on the Mammals of Dorset two species of Marten are again described (23):

#### GENUS *MARTES*

Marten Cat, (*Martes foina*)

The Rev William Chafin in his 'Anecdotes of Cranborne Chase', records Marten Cats as one of the animals hunted there but believes them (1816) to be nearly extinct, their skins are too valuable

for them to be allowed to exist. In 1836 one was caught alive near Stock House by the Rev H.F. Yeatmans hounds but biting the Huntsmans Hounds severely was kept alive for some little time. The paper then examines the status of *M. martes* in Dorset and not only places TWO species of Marten within the fauna of Dorset but names *M. foinea* as the more well known one.

The main external difference between the two species is that *M. foinea* has a white patch or bib rather than a cream patch on its chest. There are also minor osteological and dentition differences as well as genetic ones, and it is interesting to note that even in areas where there is no doubt that the two species co-exist, for example across much of mainland Europe, the two species do not seem to interbreed. The naturalists (and indeed the politicians) of the late Victorian and early 20th Century eras are renowned for their arbitrary creation of new species, and their equally arbitrary 'lumping together' of different species in order to make life easier for the taxonomist. It seems therefore an indisputable fact that until the last century TWO species of Marten DID exist in Britain where only one has survived into the history books. As we have seen, however the current status of either species in the area is doubtful in the extreme, although I would not like to rule out the possibility of both species having survived. It looks extremely likely as if the accepted Mammalogy of this country contains at least one glaring mistake.

The history of the taxonomy of the British Mustelids is a complicated one and several species which are no longer recognised have been described. The Irish race of the Stoat, for example seems to be markedly different from the main body of the species and the marked sexual dimorphism in the Weasel led to some 19th Century observers concluding that there were in fact two separate species, and the white winter colouration of the Stoat has also prompted the inclusion of a separate species, The Ermine, into a few early handbooks on mammals. One should not create new species on the basis of tiny physiological differences and it would be extremely unwise to consider the Irish Stoat, the Lesser Weasel or the

Ermine as separate species, the taxonomic situation of the British Beech Marten is an entirely different matter. We are not dealing with tiny differences but with an entire species that coexists with The Pine Marten across most of its European range. The nineteenth century naturalists who recorded *M. foinea* from the region clearly identified the two species of Marten as being entirely separate, and until someone comes up with any evidence to the contrary I see no reason to disagree with them, and am convinced that even if they are now extinct, within the past two hundred years *M. foinea* was a resident of the South Western peninsula.

It seems therefore that there are, or have been, three distinct species of Martens (*M. martes*, *M. foinea* and *M. americana*), at large in the Devon Countryside. The sightings continue but which of the species they belong to or whether they are hybrids remains to be seen. Despite the undoubted probability of my confusing the matter further there is a fourth species of Marten which may be responsible for some of these sightings. The Sable (*Martes zibellina*) is a common animal of northern Eurasia. It is also the unfortunate possessor of the most valuable pelt in the genus Martes. It is a common resident of fur farms and has been bred widely. In the

years before the multitude of different forms of legislation which now control the fur industry were introduced the South West was a popular site for small, unlicensed fur farms. It is not impossible that some specimens of this species which is a hardy and successful animal escaped into the wild. (The animal seen by Mr Flemming in 1988 was darker than one would have expected a Pine Marten to be and had no distinguishing throat patch. An exact description, in short, of a Sable).

### CONCLUSION

It seems certain that *M. martes* did not become extinct in the mid Nineteenth Century as has often been claimed. There have been too many sightings in the years prior to 1950, for this to possibly be the case. It is also certain that although their antecedents, and indeed even their exact species remain uncertain several colonies of these rare, elusive and beautiful small

mammals still exist in the wilder parts of Devonshire. It also seems very likely that, at least in the past two hundred years, Devon had two species of native Marten instead of the one that is generally recognised. The statement by Alston in 1879 that all British Martens were in fact of one species was based on scarce (and now vanished) source material without the benefit of technology now available to contemporary scientists and is not borne out by anecdotal or folkloric evidence which tend to oppose his theory.

Potentially, the puzzle should be quite easy to solve. The Dorset accounts show that the animals were killed for their pelts and it seems likely that preserved specimens of both species exist in museums and in private collections. In the 1990s we have access to subtle forms of genetic and biochemical analysis undreamed of by the Victorian Scientists who could arbitrarily create or destroy species at the stroke of a pen. The true situation is less encouraging. The mounted Pine Martens in West Country

Museum Collections are few and far between. The specimen which was 'once in the collection of the Plymouth Institution' was wild caught, its precise origin is unknown, although it has been suggested that it was killed on Dartmoor.(5). The specimen in Truro Museum is of Cornish Origin but is also without documentation.(7). The specimen in the Plymouth collection was presented by H.G.Hurrell, which would suggest that it was not of wild origin, the specimen in the Royal Albert Museum is labelled as a 'Continental specimen which lived wild having escaped from Hurrells collection, and subsequently been presented to the collection by Major Vickary', and the specimen in the Ilfracombe Museum, according to the 1935 report of the Ilfracombe Natural History Society (4) was... "Given in 1933 by Mr W.J.Parsons, of Combe Martin and was shot at Lynton 'many years ago'". Daphne Hills (16) of the Mammal Department at the British Museum (Natural History) informs me that there are no West Country specimens of either The Pine Marten or the Polecat in the National Collection and she repeats the currently accepted party line that "there are no specimens attributed to M foina from any part of Great Britain". The present state of Mustelid taxonomy is so

confused that it seems unlikely that even if we were able to capture a living specimen of one of the mystery martens, that its precise identity could be discovered without DNA typing. (The members of the Marten family are all very closely related, indeed several authorities have suggested that the entire family be regarded as a single species and the eight species, four of which we have seen may have been members of the Devonian zoofauna be demoted to sub specific status).

If I am correct in my assumptions and Hurrell did introduce new blood into the ailing Devonian Pine Marten population, and if as Ian Linn has suggested the new blood was actually of transatlantic origin we have an appalling taxonomic mess. If *M zibbelinna* has also

escaped/been deliberately introduced into the area, then matters can only get more complicated. Several scientists who are well recognised as being eminent men in their own specific field have told me that although the technology needed to solve the riddle of the Mustelid taxonomy once and for all through DNA analysis undoubtedly exists, in these days of draconian funding and manpower cuts, there is little hope of such research being carried out. Lack of money, lack of resources and lack of interest has condemned my researches into the Martens of the West Country to an unsatisfactory conclusion.

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"There are Marten Cats and Badgers and foxes in the Enchanted Woods"

W,B Yeats  
"Celtic Twilight"

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Obviously you are interested in the weirder side of the Biological Sciences or you would not be reading this magazine.

Would you actually like to get involved to a greater extent? This is NOT a club or organisation. It is also not a publically funded foundation for scientific research, but as always seems to be the case when one deals with subjects of Fortean interest it is something in between.

We need representatives in as many countries, counties and even districts as possible. If you want to take on the added headache of being an accredited representative of The Centre for Fortean Zoology then please get in touch. The job is (obviously) both hard work and completely unpaid but we need people to liaise with their local newspapers, to liaise with their local councils, to interview eyewitnesses, collect specimens and to run up appalling telephone bills whilst engaged in long night time conversations with Jon and Jan.

We are planning a cuttings library open to all. Please send us any cuttings or photocopies that you come across. Remember to mark them with where they came from. Within the next few months we hope to be able to circulate a catalogue of cuttings available and for a nominal fee to cover ONLY photocopying costs and postage we will send copies of anything we have to anyone who wants it.

We are also planning a permanent Museum of Cryptozoology as soon as we have enough exhibits and somewhere where a permanent display could be kept. We have several ideas in the pipeline on this one and we hope that, like the Conference of Fortean Zoology, another of our ongoing projects something concrete will be achieved this year. It is time for us to reclaim this branch of Zoology from the people who would have it become just another, rather tedious science.

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# FROGFALL FEATURE

It seems appropriate that the debut issue of a magazine edited by someone who is closely involved with a musical ensemble called 'The Amphibians from Outer Space' should feature a whole miscellany of articles on, or apertaining various strange and out of place tailless amphibians. As I was typing up this paragraph I caught a glimpse of something moving across the carpet. It was a medium sized frog which does not appear to be of the species usually found in Exeter. His name is Harold and he now sits, happily gulping away and eating crickets in one of the Centre for Fortean Zoology vivaria until someone can decide what to do with him.....

A FROG OR TOAD FALL DURING THE 1950's AT PORTSMOUTH IN HAMPSHIRE.

by NICK MALORET

In April 1987 I went to interview a lady living locally regarding a falling object that had torn a hole in her conservatory roof. After examination at the Geology department of Portsmouth Poly this object was identified as probably being a lump of foreign runway tarmac that had lodged in an aircraft tyre. However my dissatisfaction at not having discovered a fall in the Fortean mould or even an honest to goodness meteorite was tempered by a comment from Mrs Nash, the witness. She recalled, I was fascinated to learn, a friend mentioning having experienced a frog or toad fall at Fallington, just north of Portsmouth, some years previously. Mrs Nash told me that she would try and contact her friend and perhaps try and arrange a meeting.

Sorry to say I never did hear anything further about the Farlington story, but nothing daunted, decided to write to the Portsmouth News asking readers for information about the event. Much to my surprise I received two telephone calls and four letters describing a whole series of these frog-toad falls. Intriguingly three of these letters appeared to relate to the same event and a very local one at that. All the witnesses describe this frog or toad fall (none were certain of the species) as occurring in the 1950s and according to one, possibly around July 1954. The locality of the event in all these

reports is Copnor in central Portsmouth. This is a densely populated residential district so that the number of witnesses to this happening may not be surprising.

The first account is from Mrs Pat Potter of Portsea:

"On reading your letter in the paper today. I had the same experience when I was a girl living at Copnor. I am forty two now and when I was about nine, my mother and I went to the evening "pictures" at the old 'Tivoli', now a garage in Copnor Road. We came out of the pictures at about 10.00 at night and it was pouring with rain. We crossed Copnor Road and went into Keswick Avenue to cross the bridge called White Stone Bridge, as we lived in Dover Road at the time. Anyway in Keswick Avenue millions of baby frogs or toads came down with the pouring rain. I was laughing all the time. I scooped up loads of them with my mum, and took them home, and put them in the garden. To this day, I have always remembered it, and told the event many times, but people do not believe me, especially my four sons (all grown up now)".

Mrs Potter later confirmed to me on the telephone that the frogs or toads were very much alive, and were falling all over her as they came out of the sky.

The second witness is Mr Harfield of Denmead, Hants. He was situated (again sometime during the 1950's), near the 'Airspeed' playing fields at Copnor. It had just stopped raining after a cloudburst and the time was between 8.00 and 8.30 PM when he noticed hundreds of small frogs or toads littering the playing fields and the 'White Stone' pedestrian railway bridge nearby. Estimating the time somewhat earlier than Mrs Potter Mr Harfield is quite adamant that the fall occurred earlier in the evening. Were there two separate falls that evening I wonder? Again the frog-toads were alive and fully developed-lacking tails.

Two witnesses were involved in the final report; Mr and Mrs Howe, still resident in Copnor. The following is Mrs Howe's description of the event.

"Having seen your article about toads falling from the sky, we are sure that you will be interested in a similar incident experienced by ourselves. Many years ago, having visited our parents in Redcar Avenue, Copnor, we left the house (on foot) and before we reached the end of the road, a very heavy rainstorm overtook us. Imagine our surprise when we saw an increasing number of tiny frogs spreading across the road. They slithered about on the wet road and multiplied by the dozen as we stood there fascinated! They had to be coming down with the heavy rain, and we stood for a couple of minutes, amazed and intrigued. Unfortunately we were getting very wet and had quite some way to go before we would get home, so we left the scene bewildered and very puzzled. It is difficult to remember when this happened but it would be somewhere around the 1950's.

There was nobody else around at the time and so we were probably the only people to see the strange phenomenon. The frogs (or toads or whatever), were no more than a couple of inches long, perhaps even less! Your newsletter has brought the memory back to us. We were very young at the time, and we can well remember trying to tell our friends about the incident. They thought we were telling a shaggy dog story!"

Hoping to find some reference to this July 1954 (?) frog-toad fall, I checked

the archives of the Portsmouth Evening News for the period and although I found no mention of the event, one or two things turned up that may be relevant.

Firstly it was reported that June 1954 was the wettest for thirty years, with farmers and church fetes generally having a hard time of it. Mention is also made of a solar eclipse on the 30th June, and earlier, on the 23rd June there were three independent sightings of a UFO seen at night above Portsdown Hill. One witness described the object as shaped like a rotating spinning top and that it disappeared towards the east 'like a flash!'

There also seemed to be an ongoing debate in the letter page of the paper regarding the strange weather, with correspondents variously blaming God, The Russians, and Intergalactic Warfare

Lastly I should mention an odd coincidence in this report. Mrs Potter's address is "Curzon Howe", and two of the witnesses were also named Howe. How indeed?

Three further apparently isolated cases of frog-toad falls:

Yorkshire 1930's. Probably a Sunday 2.30 PM.

Mr C Campbell was motorcycling with a friend on the Thirsk to Scarborough Rd and was caught in a heavy cloudburst. They sheltered under a wall. When the rain ceased they made to continue their journey and were amazed to see 'thousands' of Small, Live frogs or toads scattered on the ground.

Brownsdown, Gosport, Hants. Easter 1930's.

Small frogs or toads littered the ground after a cloudburst. Caller omitted to leave name.

Tunbridge Wells, Kent. Probably 1950, late July or August.

Mrs D.F Yates was staying with relatives in Tunbridge Wells, and whilst walking with them on Rustall Common experienced a shower of 'hundreds' of small live frogs. There was no sign of wind and rain.



## THE GOLDEN FROGS OF BOVEY TRACEY

The story of the Golden Frogs of Bovey Tracey (1) is essentially one of those quasi religious medieval allegories which are in themselves garbled survivors from a pagan tradition. The story goes that a poor woodsman lived with his equally destitute family in Bovey Tracey. Their child was suffering from an unspecified illness and was not likely to survive the night. On top of this farrago of misfortune there was a severe thunderstorm. There was a knock on the door and a mysterious lady entered demanding (in a querulous voice) shelter and food. Despite their many misfortunes the woodsman and his family welcomed the mysterious lady, gave her milk and food (which they could ill afford); and a seat by the fire. She then blessed the ailing infant who was miraculously cured, and before vanishing (up a road called to this day Mary Street) she said that so that her benefactors would know this wasn't a dream not only would the child be forever cured but that the next day the family would discover a new spring full of crystal clear water and bright golden frogs.

The religious significance in this charming tale (excepting the frogs) is obvious, and I would hazard a guess that the story probably predates Christian times, and that the Marian details were added to a pagan story about Isis, Demeter, Gaia or any Earth Mother of your choosing. The thing, however that sets this story apart from a myriad of other B.V.M. Visitation legends is the odd vignette of the golden frogs. Just a tiny piece of medieval whimsy? Possibly not.

These frogs were said to have populated the area for many years. If so, what were they? The concept of brightly coloured amphibians inhabiting the English countryside is not as unusual as one might suppose. In a series of newspaper stories covered in Fortean

Times one of the events in the aftermath of the falling of 'North African' Desert Dust upon Gloucestershire recently was the appearance of several small PINK frogs, one of which is pictured in the article. Whether there is any connection remains to be seen by

future inquisitive Herpetologists both in the Dartmoor and Gloucester areas. The article went on to describe specimens of a North African desert Locust which had also been carried by the wind to this country and which had appeared all over the south of England including Plymouth and St Austell, (Incidentally a similar falling of Sahara Dust, also pink was reported from Devon on the First of July 1968) and presumably has happened on various occasions during the past.

(Other pink frogs have been recorded over the years from Sussex and The Cotswolds, and although there is a well known red phase of the common Frog (R temporaria), these animals were definitely not it). (3).

It is not inconceivable that at some time in the past (the BVM visitation took place during an exceptionally violent thunderstorm), a similar collection of desert dust which contained yellow (or golden) frogs dumped its amphibious passengers deep in the heart of the Devon countryside where they established themselves for a short while with some success. Such a fall of yellow mud in rain happened throughout the region in January 1902 and again on the 22 February 1903. (2). The phenomenon also happened on the same day in Dorset (23):

"During the early part of Sunday morning, February 22nd 1903 with a South West Wind a strangely yellow fog prevailed at Corfe Castle but towards noon some drizzling rain fell and deposited some yellow dust-or rather mud as it was then on the surface of the earth and by 12.30 p.m or perhaps a little earlier, the peculiarly yellow appearance was no longer seen in the atmosphere. Similar falls occurred in various parts of the world and there seems little doubt that all this dust that was deposited at about this time was carried in winds from the North African Desert, the Sahara in which sandstorms not long before had been observed and recorded. It was stated in the Dorset County Chronicle that this deposit of yellow dust was very noticeable on the pier at Swanage for some days after the fall took place".

Charles Fort was also interested in falls of 'Sahara Dust' (it is

interesting that the Sahara explanation was also prevalent when Fort was writing in the early parts of this century), and he was similarly unconvinced by the North African explanation. He pointed out that apart from everything else, the desert sand of the North African Wastes is silvery yellow rather than red, (4), yet these sky falls sometimes accompanied by animate and inanimate objects have been going on for millions of years. If we are to believe the official explanation that the pink frogs seen all over the south west of our country during the nineteen eighties were brought to England in clouds of pink dust blown from North Africa, then I feel that the existence of yellow (or Golden) Frogs in Bovey Tracey could be explained in the same way. As we have seen the clouds of yellow dust have appeared on several occasions and it seems possible that the mystery behind the delightful legend of the Golden Frogs of Bovey Tracey may have after five hundred years been solved.

David Bolton of the Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter suggested to me, half joking that the well attested phenomenon of North African locusts of varying species which arrive almost annually in the South West may also be responsible for the story of the Golden Frogs of Bovey Tracey. After all, he said with a wry smile, proving once and for all that it is not only Cryptozoologists that form ludicrous theories from the most flimsy of evidence, they are both yellow and they both hop.

#### REFERENCES

1. Coxhead: The Legends of Devon
2. Transactions of the Devonshire Association Vol 35 p81
3. Forrean Times 56
4. Fort: The Book of the Damned (1919)

#### POSTSCRIPT

In February 1994 local and national newspapers (for example the Daily Mail 3.2.94) were full of the story of Jaffa a three year old Frog discovered in a garden in Truro. Jaffa was, as his name implies bright orange. The Westcountry TV News carried a story about him which said that he, and a similarly coloured mate had been released in a secret

location. We contacted Mark Nicholson of the Cornwall Trust for Nature Conservation and he revealed to us that far from being an isolated occurrence these oddly coloured amphibians are popping up all over the place. Ranging in colour from bright orange, through yellow to pale cream, these creatures have been reported from all over the county and even from elsewhere in the UK although they appear to be much rarer.

The only explanation that they have come up with is that the colour changes are something to do with the excessive levels of radioactive Radon gas in the county, but they stress that this is only a theory. These animals appear to breed true to type, but as yet nothing is known of their genetic makeup or their position within the ecosystem. Jaffa, himself has been released into a safe habitat, but it is hoped that more specimens (including some of the mysterious cream coloured tadpoles that have appeared in recent years) will be obtained soon. Hopefully we shall obtain some specimens soon as well and when we do, be assured that we will tell you as much as we can. For the present however, it is fairly clear that the charming medieval legend of the Golden Frogs of Bovey Tracey might not be so far fetched after all.

#### AND IT MAKES ME WONDER...

According to the BBC Teletext service CEEFAX (1/3/94) which in recent months has been a veritable fount of knowledge for fortune zoologists hundreds of fish, 2-5 cm long were found flapping on roads in an (unfortunately) unnamed rural district of Australia. Zoologists (also unnamed) blamed the phenomenon on storms which had swept fish eggs, which had been dormant for a year or two into the clouds where they hatched and fell. Me, I reckon Rolf Harris took them with him when he was climbing his stairway to heaven.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

We are not the only UK Magazine which specialises in the subject of unknown beasts. Craig Harris is the editor of:

CRYPTO CHRONICLES  
5 Willow Court  
Droitwich  
Worcestershire  
WR9 9HL

# FROM OUR FILES.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ENID BLYTON.

"The children began to run-but before they had gone very far, they slowed down in surprise. The lane was absolutely full of small frogs! They covered the road, they hopped from the ditches, they made the wayside quite dark with their hopping bodies!.....

....A lady came past on a bicycle. She too was astonished and tried her best to ride without squashing the crowd of little frogs."It's frog-rain" she called to the children. "It's raining frogs" That's where they are coming from!"

The children looked at her in astonishment, forgetting the rainstorm. They looked up into the sky to spy frogs coming down but the rain was too hard for them to keep their heads up-and all the time more and more frogs filled the road till it really seemed that they must be falling with the rain...

....'Never believe stupid things without making sure first that they are right' said Tammylan', This idea of frog rain comes up every year-but if anyone really thought about such a thing they would know there couldn't possibly be such a thing".....

Enid Blyton  
The Children of Cherry Tree  
Farm pp 107-9 (1940)

Contributed by Petrovic the  
cyvic.

## CREATURE FALLS IN THE WEST COUNTRY

To date our own files on Fortean Zoological Phenomena are mainly concerned with events in Devon and Cornwall, but we have a few items on file which are relevant to the above articles:

Several large Pipefish were found dried and dessicated by the children of a friend of mine who astonished me by telling how they had found these remarkable corpses in their garden. The fish, though dead, had no apparent injuries and so the obvious explanation of them having been caught by seabirds

and then dropped by mistake would not seem to apply. Anyway the odds against any seabird dropping three or four of the same (fairly uncommon) species of fish in exactly the same place would seem to be rather astronomical. (The house was about four miles from the sea).

Amongst the many examples of mysterious falls of animals from the sky collected by Charles Fort (1), there are several from the West Country: "Small snails of a land species had fallen near Redruth, Cornwall, July 8th 1886 'during a heavy thunderstorm'; roads and fields were strewn with them so that they were gathered up by the hatful; none seen to fall by the writer of this account: snails said to be 'quite different to any previously known in the district'.."

Another item from Fort's collection: (1) Originally from The Times 14.4.1837:

"That in the parish of Bramford Speke, Devonshire, a large number of black worms, about three quarters of an inch in length, had fallen in a snowstorm".

These are not isolated occurrences. There are two records of what appear to be heavenly showers of hundreds of 'dirty black larvae' of an unknown species on the 26th November and again on Christmas Eve 1913.(2) It is certainly interesting, and may indeed be significant that these incidents always seem to happen in the wintertime. Indeed similar records of larva falls have been recorded from The Valley Bend district of Randolph County, West Virginia on several occasions during the winter of 1898, and again in Switzerland in 1922 (3).

## REFERENCES

1. Fort: The Book of the Damned (1919)
2. Transactions of the Devonshire Association Vol 39 p 79
3. Calkins et al: Mysteries of the Unexplained (1982)

# FROGFALLS etc



# EYEWITNESS REPORTS

Each issue we shall print reports of zoological phenomena and armed only with some wild guesses we shall attempt an explanation



♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

## STRANGE SNAKES IN NORFOLK

A couple of years ago, farmer Heather Thurgar was riding with a friend in the village of Aslacton, Norfolk when a large snake slithered across the lane in front of the horses. It disappeared into the grass verge, then returned to the road and reared up aggressively, frightening the horses. The snake was about five feet long and did not look like either an adder or a normal Grass Snake.

Back in 1961, two Italian Grass Snakes were reported in Lowestoft, twenty miles from Aslacton. The Italian Grass Snake is vivid green in colour, grows larger than the British variety, and is more aggressive. Could they be breeding in Norfolk?

A much older report concerning unusual snakes in Norfolk is recorded by J Wentworth Day (2) in 'Ghosts and Witches' (Batsford 1954). He quotes the 'Norfolk Chronicle', September 28th 1782, as follows:

"On Monday the 14th Inst. a snake of enormous size was destroyed at Ludham in this county by Jasper Andrews of that place. It measured 5ft 8 inches long, was almost three foot in circumference and had a very long snout. What is remarkable there were two excrescences on the forepart of the head which very much resembled horns. The creature seldom made its appearance in the daytime but kept concealed in subterranean retreats, several of which have been discovered in the town"...

Wentworth Day also mentions a story of two snakes, each six feet long, which attacked a man at Dereham, and speculates that all these creatures were foreigners which had escaped from ships at Yarmouth.

JAN WILLIAMS

## The Italian race of the Grass Snake (Natrix Natrix)

"Thousands, literally are offered for sale every spring in pet stores all over the country, and I have even seen them sold from market stalls. These are mainly imported from Italy, and may differ in minor ways from those that are native to Great Britain...."

C.H. Keeling: 'Unusual  
Pets' (Foyle 1958)

Prior to the CITES legislation of 1983 large numbers of European Reptiles of a number of species were imported as pets and it is not particularly suprising, if the much larger Southern European race of Natrix which is bright green with yellow throat patches should have become established in Norfolk.

There are various species of snakes that boast two large horns but they are mostly from the tropics as well as being very poisonous. Wentworth Day's snakes are a real mystery and without any more information I wouldn't like to hazard any guesses.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

## GIANT "RABBITS" IN DEVONSHIRE

Mike Davis saw what he thought was a giant rabbit in the woods near Starcross.

"I was chestnutting in the woods when I heard a twig snap. I thought that perhaps it was a gamekeeper warning me off his land. I saw a large rabbit or hare in the sit up and beg position. It must have been about three foot high. If I could have got close enough to it I reckon it would have come up to the top of my leg. I chased it a fair way into the wood and it went into the undergrowth. This is the only time I have ever seen it. I mentioned it to a guy who goes rabbiting there. He agreed that there were some big ones in the area."

Another anomalous giant rabbit, which this time provoked exactly the opposite diagnosis was reported from Westward Ho' in January 1985.(4)

William Phillips discovered a great number of footprints in his garden in Beech Rd. He was convinced that they were made by a wallaby because they were long, deep and in pairs which indicated that they were made by an animal jumping with two feet together. These mysterious paw prints were examined by an animal welfare expert summoned by the local newspaper (and bear in mind that this usually means that the person in question was in charge of the cake stall at the RSPCA summer fete and wouldn't know a wallaby if it was placed in front of him on a silver platter with a sprig of Holly behind each ear), who identified the tracks as those of a large rabbit.

Heuvelmans categorised some of the 'Giant Rabbit' sightings in the unexplored centre of Australia as cryptic marsupials (1) so I shall follow his example and do likewise. There have been wallabies kept on a farm near Holcombe for many years. They have been known to escape. When Mike was at school in about 1981 one escaped but as far as I know was soon recaptured.

The Dawlish Wallabies are the property of Joyce Butler of Holcombe. (2) who has kept wallabies since the mid 1960s. In 1991 she had 41 of them and admits that during the 1970s they had a problem with falling trees due to Dutch Elm Disease. She says that some of her animals may have escaped then, one certainly escaped in May 1985 when it was tranquilised and returned to her from where it had been found in Teignmouth (4), and no doubt other animals have escaped from her collection over the years, although she is convinced that other people in the Dawlish area also keep Wallabies. Mike Davis' giant Rabbits seem to suggest that she is correct.

When I spoke to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Starcross in the early spring of 1992 they admitted that there had been a number of feral wallaby sightings from the area over the years, but insisted that they were all traceable to Mrs Butlers collection, and, that these

accounts were all of isolated specimens that there was no reason to suppose that they had been breeding.

In July 1986 a lone wallaby was seen apparently waiting for a bus, at a bus stop in Teignmouth. (3). At around about the same time another wallaby was killed in a road traffic accident on Haldon Hill. In 1988 another unfortunate marsupial was killed by a car outside Torquay, and in 1991 The Exeter Museum received the corpse of an animal which had been killed by a car near Lydford on the Western edge of Dartmoor, a place notorious for being the haunt of far more less benign quasi feroceous beasts than harmless and herbivorous wallabies.

#### REFERENCES

1. Heuvelmans: On the track of Unknown Animals (1956)
2. Exeter Weekly News 27.5.91
3. Teignmouth Post 24.7.86
4. Fortean Times 45

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#### MURDER SHE WROTE?

Has anyone else any examples of Bird Euthanasia? I keep a mixed collection of birds and recently a male Chinese Painted Quail of mine was taken suddenly and severely ill. It was obviously terminal and so I left it in peace only to find that when I returned a few minutes later that his mate, (a shy and retiring little bird) had finished his suffering and pecked him to death. Whether this was 'Murder', 'Euthanasia' or even 'Cannibalism' I'm not sure but the female has shown no other signs of aggression either before or after this incident.

Rickard and Michell, in Living Wonders (1983) wrote about bird battles and even bird courts where a creature who had transgressed against the rules of the other members of its social group was apparently 'tried' by a group leader and then sentenced either to ostracism or in some cases to death, but the concept of Avian Mercy Killings is a new one to me. It is difficult however when one is dealing with ones own pets to know where Scientific reasoning ends and Anthropomorphism begins.

ALISON DOWNES

# CRYPTO A-Z

## PART ONE

Jan Williams deserves the Cryptozoological version of The Purple Heart for services above and beyond the call of duty for even considering undertaking this mammoth task: An annotated list of unknown beasts worldwide in alphabetical order.....

**ABU SOTAN:** Carnivorous beast marked with black blotches or stripes, living in mountains near the River Rahad, Sudan. There have been similar creatures reported in Ethiopia.

**AGOGWE:** Small Tanzanian man-beast with russet fur. It has been suggested that these animals represent a surviving relict population of Australopithecines.

**AHOOL:** Also known as The Athol, this is a large bat like creature with a twelve foot wingspan that has been reported from Java. This grey furred creature has a monkey like face, backwards pointing feet, and feeds on fish.

**AMAROK:** Enormous wolf known to Eskimos in Greenland. According to Dr Karl Shuker in 'Extraordinary Animals Worldwide' (Robert Hale 1991), a specimen was shot in the Nineteenth Century and the skin sent to Copenhagen Museum.

**AMERANTHROPOIDES LOYSI** (De Loys' Ape): Photographed by Francois de Loys during an expedition on the Columbia-Venezuela border in 1920. Ameranthropoides has been the subject of much controversy. De Loys described the animal shot on the banks of the Tarra River as tail-less, five foot and one and three quarters inches in height, and with thirty two teeth (not thirty six), in which respect it differs from all known South American primates. Sceptics suggest that de Loys was either mistaken or deliberately fraudulent, and that the creature is actually a Spider Monkey. Support for de Loys comes from Indian sightings of similar animals in this region and in many other parts of South America.

**ANACONDA (GIANT):** Persistent rumours from Brazil speak of Anacondas reaching lengths of seventy foot plus - more than twice the accepted maximum length for this species.

**ANDEAN WOLF:** In 1927, animal trader Lorenz Hagenbeck bought the pelt of an unknown animal from an Argentinian collector who said that it came from The Andes. The long, thick fur varied from black to dark brown in colour, and the neck hair extended to form a mane. German zoologist Ingo Krumbiegel connected the skull with an unusual canid skull in his collection, also from The Andes and in 1953 named the creature *Dasycyon hagenbecki* (Hagenbeck's thick haired wolf). No further evidence has been found.

**ANGEDA:** Monster of Dubawnt Lake, Canada, with huge fin. Eskimo legend states that the bones of a great beast were once found on the shores of the lake.

**ARASSAS:** Creature with the body of a lizard and the head of a cat legendarily found in the French Alps.

**ATLAS BEAR:** Small sub-species of the Brown Bear, apparently extinct by the end of the 19th Century, but still occasionally reported from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

**AYPA:** Guyanan aquatic creature with head like a tiger, very large teeth and a body covered in scales.



# THE NERVOUS TWITCHER

Twitchers are the train spotters of Ornithology. They

travel hundreds of miles to see a rare bird that shouldn't have been there in the first place. Alison Downes, our very own Nervous Twitcher presents a regular column on all that is most peculiar amongst our Portean Feathered Friends.

## OUT OF PLACE AND OUT ON A LIMB

Many interesting bizarre stories have come to light recently in the Avian World. Twitchers have been excited by the visit of a rare **Black Throated Thrush** (*Turdus ruficollis*), usually seen in India and Pakistan to the River Stour, near Bournemouth just after the New Year. (1) More recently, at the end of February a **Ross Gull** caused a stir by spending a period near the River Wear in Sunderland rather than in its native Kolyma Delta in Siberia, (2) but all of this is as nothing compared to the birth of a perfectly healthy **4 legged** Emu in Texas, on a ranch belonging to Mike Hobbs. (3) (I wonder what Rod Hull would make of that?) From four legged birds to one legged birds - a reward has been offered to anyone knowing the whereabouts of property developer Malcolm Keller who disappeared allegedly owing four million pounds, and took with him 'Hoppy' his one legged Toucan. (4)

## SEABIRD DISASTER

More serious and disturbing news is the plight of the seabirds along the Northern coasts of Great Britain. Many birds normally die during the winter months but numbers have been far greater this year. An estimated 67,000 have died of starvation in the past few weeks. Experts looking into the situation cannot decide whether this has been caused by severe winter storms, making it difficult for the birds to fish or by overfishing or pollution by man. The debate continues. (5)

## THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY'S GREATEST HITS

A Partridge presumed to be critically endangered if not extinct has reappeared. **David's Tree Partridge** (*Arborophila davidi*) aka **The Orange necked Hill Partridge** has not been seen in the wild since 1927, but two sightings have recently been reported from Vietnam. (6) To continue on the Partridge theme, a new species, not belonging to any existing genus has been discovered in the Udzungwa Mountains of Tanzania. The discovery was made by five scientists from the Zoological Museum of Copenhagen University lead by Dr Lars Dinesen. The new species named **Xenoperdix udzungwenis** lives in evergreen forests in an area rich in unusual birdlife. It appears to be plentiful and the scientists believe they may be descendants of a species which used to be common along the East African coast and into Asia. (7)

## TURNING JAPANESE

Scientists in Japan are aiming to restore Japans Crested Ibis. They have a few problems because although there may possibly be a few left in the wild there's only one pair in captivity and they're too old to breed. When the birds depart for that great aviary in the sky, they plan to freeze them, and then try to recreate them by planting Ibis DNA in the egg of another bird. (Shades of Jurassic Park).

## REFERENCES

1. Teletext on Three 8/1/94
2. Teletext on Four 28/2/94
3. BBC 2 Teletext (Newsround) 28/1/94
4. Cage and Aviary Birds 26/2/94
5. Today 1/3/94
6. Cage and Aviary Birds 22/1/94
7. Cage and Aviary Birds 26/2/94
8. BBC2 Teletext Newsround 2/2/94

## A QUESTION OF RHINOCERI

Alberto Lopez Acha from Barcelona wrote to us asking for information about the relict population of The Javan Rhinoceros which was discovered in Vietnam in 1988. The Javan Rhinoceros is a well known, if exceedingly rare animal and we thought that this would be an easy question to answer. Not So. Our researches into the current status of the two species of Asian Forest Rhinoceros proved the aptness of Oscar Wilde's maxim that the truth is never pure and seldom simple.

In 1988 a female Javan Rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) was shot by a local tribesman in the jungles of Southern Vietnam about eighty miles northeast of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). (1). This was doubly suprising because not only is *R. sondaicus* one of the world's 12 most endangered species of mammal it had generally been supposed to have been confined to the Indonesian island of Java since the 1940's. Or had it?

Hans Hwass (1956) wrote that the animal was confined to Malaya and Java (2), The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Wildlife (3) said (1990) that the species was confined to Java with 'possibly a few hanging on in the remoter parts of Indo-China', Grzimek (1988) (4) wrote that the species was completely confined to one National Park in Java (and went on to say that 'reports of sightings in other locations are more than twenty years old and were considered unreliable even then') and the Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Animal Life (1952) merely stated that it had been 'exterminated over much of its previous range'.(5)

These conflicting status reports were too much for us so I did what any red blooded Cryptozoologist would have done under the circumstances. I telephoned Jan Williams who telephoned Karl Shuker who said, (much to my horror) that such discrepancies between major reference books were common and that the material in such books was often out of date and sometimes wildly inaccurate.

Karl went on to say that The Javan Rhinoceros had indeed been thought to have been confined to Java since the 1940's and that the discovery of an apparently healthy population in Vietnam was therefore incredibly good news for the survival of the species.

# HELP!

The HELP Section of this magazine has two functions. Firstly we act as a fairly traditional magazine 'Questions and Answers' page but we also publish requests from you, the readers for help with your own researches.



If you can help with any of these queries, or if you have queries of your own, please write to :

HELP, Animals And Men  
The Centre for  
Portean Zoology  
15 Holne Court  
Exwick, Exeter.

Something that everyone seems to have overlooked however is that the two populations of this, undoubtedly the rarest large land mammal in the world, may actually be different sub species. According to Khan (1939) (6) and Nowak (1991) (7) until about 150 years ago there were actually three different sub species widely distributed over South East Asia.

*R s inermis*: Eastern India, Bangladesh, Assam, Burma

*R s annamiticus*: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Eastern Thailand

*R s sondaicus*: Tannaserim, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Western Java

Still earlier, perhaps until the Sixteenth Century, other populations lived in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan and Hunan (Rookmaker 1980) (8). These Chinese subspecies were certainly wiped out four hundred years ago and it seems almost certain that the sub species *inermis* is also extinct. It seems likely, however that the newly discovered population in Vietnam are of the subspecies *annamiticus* whereas the Javan specimens are *R.s sondaicus* and therefore in the interests of genetic purity the suggestions that have been made about interbreeding specimens from the two populations in order to enrich the gene pool may not be such a good idea after all.

Karl Shuker (1) also wrote about a small population of the hairy Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) that was discovered in a remote valley in Sarawak in 1986, and so whilst we are on the subject of the Asian Forest Rhinos I thought that it might be useful to include a short piece on the subject of the current status of this, possibly the most peculiar looking of the Rhinos.

There are three sub species: (7)

*D.s lasiotus*: Formerly found in India, Bangladesh and Burma, there may only be six or seven specimens left in Burma.

*D.s,harrisoni*: Borneo. Only about 30-50 left. These include the survivors in Sarawak discussed earlier, and various relict populations in Sabah, which were noted by British Army personnel in the mid sixties when they weren't meant to be there either. An acquaintance of mine who was involved in these clandestine military operations told me that although he had never seen one several members of his unit had found droppings and footprints which suggested that the species may, (at the time) have been more widespread than was otherwise supposed.

*D.s.sumatrensis*: This is the most widespread of the subspecies with about 100 specimens still living in peninsular Malaya and 400-700 on Sumatra itself.

The biology of both species is relatively little known both because of their rarity and because of their geographical inaccessibility. They co-existed over much of their former range because in areas where both species existed (4) the Javan Rhino lived on the wooded floodplains of large rivers whilst the Sumatran species lived in the more mountainous regions.

It is a good sign for the general progress of both species and of Cryptozoology as a science that such a large species can live undiscovered in an area not only just eighty miles from a major city but that was moreover scarified by defoliants such as Agent Orange in what was probably one of the most ecologically unsound wars in history.

One final snippet of interest that I discovered during my rhino researches. During the aforementioned military campaign in Borneo during the sixties one British Army Unit reported that their camp had been systematically destroyed by a herd of elephants. 'Nonsense' said the wise men at GHQ in Singapore. 'Elephants don't exist in Borneo'. Apparently, however one feral herd, the descendants of a number of AFRICAN elephants presented to one of the Sultans of Brunei still roams the jungles, the only wild African Elephants in Asia.



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2. Hans Hwass: Mammals of the World (1956)
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4. Grzimek: Mammals of the World Vol 4 (1988)
5. Drimmer (Ed): The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Animal Life Vol 6 (1952)
6. Mohd Khan Bin Momin Khan: Asian Rhinos: an action plan for their conservation. (IUCN)
7. Ronald Nowak (Ed): Walkers Mammals of the World Volume 2 (1991)
8. L.C. Rookmaaker: The distribution of the rhinoceros in eastern India, Bangladesh, China and the Indo Chinese region (Zool Anz Jena 205:253-268)

# HELP! WANTED

Animals and Men subscriber, Richard Muirhead, of Salisbury wants information on the following subjects:

1. Large Bats in The Forest of Dean.
2. Albino Foxes
3. Something that looked like a Duck Billed Platypus which was killed sometime in the 1700s in the Earl of Tylney's park, near Wanstead in Essex.
4. A wolf killed by a car in West Suffolk during the 1970s, (mentioned in The New Statesman Fortean Column 21.2.94)

Alberto Lopez Acha from Barcelona wants information on the Vu Quang Ox. Apart from the references in Karl Shuker's 'The Lost Ark' (1993), I have very little information. Apparently there was an article in a recent issue of 'BBC Wildlife'. Photocopies anybody?

The Editor of this august journal is always interested in information about the following subjects:

1. The wildlife of Hong Kong, especially its Herpetofauna.
2. Sligo's Salamander, and any other out of place Megalobatrachius species.
3. Any reports about Mustelids.

4. Living specimens of any species of Amphiuma, Mudpuppy, Siren or Caecilian. Please scrutinise any pet shops you visit and give me a ring if anything turns up. I have an extremely large and lonely Two Toed Amphiuma looking for a mate.

Paul Garner writes:

'There is a well known photograph of a decaying carcass which was hauled up by Japanese fishermen near Christchurch, New Zealand in April 1977, which some speculated might have been a modern plesiosaur. I have read somewhere that analysis of fibres from the carcass revealed the presence of Elastodin, a protein found only in sharks.

I would be interested to have any further information on this case. Can anyone shed any light on exactly when the initial discovery was made - some reports specify the 10th April, others say the 25th. Also, have the results of the fibre analysis ever been published, if so where. I hope somebody out there can enlighten me'

**NEXT ISSUE:** Green Lizards which aren't Green Lizards and Sand Lizards which may be. A Round up of queries and historical oddities.

## Reviews Section

**THE LOST ARK (New and Rediscovered Animals of the 20th Century)** by Dr Karl Shuker (COLLINS). Price 14.99.

This is one of those few books where the words 'Exhaustive' and 'Definitive' can actually be used without the reviewer resorting to hyperbole.

I hate to think of the hours of painstaking research that must have gone into this book. It catalogues the Zoological discoveries of the 20th Century.....all of them.

Most books, especially Cryptozoological ones, are content to recycle the relevant chapter of 'On the Track of Unknown Animals' but this book is an exception. Such Zoological Obscurities as The Pygmy Otter Shrew and Bulmer's Fruit Bat rub shoulders with such well known creatures as The Golden Hamster and The Neon Tetra, and it is a tribute to this remarkable piece of scholarship that Shuker makes the stories behind the discovery of well known household pets as rivetting reading as the more arcane zoological titbits on offer.

He sticks his neck out by including such Cryptids as *Homo pongoides* and *Ameranthropoides loysii* amongst the creatures he describes, but he writes with such entertaining conviction that even hard boiled sceptics like me are won over. One cannot disagree with Gerald Durrell when he writes that "This fascinating and encouraging book should be part of every naturalist's library".

JONATHAN DOWNES

**MY HIGHLAND KELLAS CATS** by DI FRANCIS (Jonathan Cape) Price 14.99

Many Cryptozoologists have been less than impressed with some of Di Francis's hypotheses in the past. Many people considered her first book, theorising that a hitherto undescribed species of indigenous British Big Cat roamed the

highlands of Great Britain, to be ridiculous and although I believe that if Cryptozoology is not to become as hidebound as most of the rest of the natural sciences there must be room for apparently absurd theories, like most other Cryptozoological types I found the parts of her second book which put forward the possibility that the Genette Tate disappearance could be laid at the door of a passing leopard both sensationalist and revolting.

Much to my surprise, however this new book, although it breaks little ground scientifically is rather a heartwarming little tale of a woman and a number of cats on their own against the forces of hidebound scientific intransigence in the shape of the British Museum (Natural History) in general and the Mammal Department in particular. The Centre for Fortean Zoology has had dealings with this department in the past and can therefore sympathise. As a book, however although it is not an essential addition to the Fortean library it is an interesting and pleasant read and with a few reservations it comes with the Petrovic seal of recommendation. BILL PETROVIC

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